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ABSTRACT

Information is presented on a study designed to learn how successful Mexican American students surmount the factors contributing to Mexican American student attrition at the University of Arizona. The subjects were from the 1985 entering freshman class. Intensive interviews were conducted with each student, and content analysis of the interviews was the method used to analyze the data. Emerging from the anecdotal, self-reported data were the common experiences relating to the persistence of Mexican American students at the university. Data divide naturally into the areas of personal behaviors and problems and institutional behaviors and problems. Only summary findings from the personal area are reviewed. Several categories relating to personal behaviors were determined (human support, financial adversity commitment, and gender differences). Findings include the following: (1) in the area of familial support, a method is needed to involve the parents in the students' education so they can develop an understanding of the challenge their child faces and (2) in the area of financial adversity there is a need for education on the meaning of financial aid and its availability. Many of the experiences noted are particular to minority groups; (for example, most have parents who are blue collar workers, and many college females have the double burden of schoolwork and pressure to marry or work while attending school while their brothers have all expenses paid). Contains 38 references. (SM)

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HISPANIC STUDENT SUCCESS

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HISPANIC STUDENT SUCCESS

Enrollment patterns and educational economics have created an urgency for institutions of higher education to evaluate what has become known as their "school holding power" (Houston, 1987). With the possession of this knowledge institutions can find effective ways to maximize a student's chances for retention and success. Increasing enrollment means not only attracting new students but retaining, through graduation, those currently attending.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

Tinto (1975, 1987) proposed a student attrition model using an interpretation of Durkheim's sociological explanation of suicide as the foundation of a model for studying student dropout. Durkheim's theory argues that suicide is tied to the absence of social integration. Tinto theorizes that, just as the lack of social integration can produce suicide in society at large, it can also produce withdrawal from higher education (Tinto & Cullen, 1973).

According to the model, students enter a college or university with varying patterns of personal, family, and academic characteristics including initial intentions toward college attendance and personal goals (Table 1). These intentions, or commitments, become modified through interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the institution. Satisfying and rewarding encounters with the formal and informal academic and social systems of the institution lead to greater integration and to student persistence. Negative interactions and experiences distance the individual from the academic and social communities of the institution, contributing to the individual's withdrawal from the institution.

Table 1

Tinto's Background Characteristics

- Family Background
  - Socioeconomic Status
  - Parent's Education
  - Quality of Relationship with Family
  - Interest and Expectations of Parents
- Individual Characteristics
  - Student Ability
    - Grade Performance
    - Standardized Test Performance
  - Personality and Attitudinal
- Past Educational Experiences
  - Performance in High School
  - Characteristics of High School
- Goal Commitment
  - Educational Plans
  - Educational Expectations
  - Career Expectations
- Gender

Astin's Theory of Involvement

Student integration into the academic and social systems of an institution, the nucleus of Tinto's theory, is similar to Astin's (1984) concept of "involvement" (Table 2). Astin (1984, 1985) proposed a "theory of involvement" to explain the dynamics of how students develop. According to Astin "students learn by becoming involved" (1985, p. 133). Astin's theory centers on five postulates: (1) involvement requires investment of psychological and physical energy in objects; (2) involvement is a continuous concept; (3) involvement has quantitative and qualitative features; (4) the amount of learning or development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of involvement; and (5) educational effectiveness of any policy or practice is related to its capacity to induce involvement in students (Astin, 1984, 1985).

Table 2

Tinto's Variables of Interaction with the College Environment	Astin's Factors of Environmental Involvement
Academic Integration	Academic Involvement
Intellectual Development	
Grade Performance	Cognitive Development
Social Integration	
Interaction with Faculty/Staff	Honors Program Involvement
Faculty Support	
Collective Affiliation	Student Faculty Interaction
Friendship	
Support Groups/Subcultures	Place of Residence
Extra Curricular Activities	
Informal Peer Groups	Athletic Involvement
Semi-Formal Extra Curricular Activities	Involvement in Student Government

Higher Education and Chicano Students

Hispanic students represent an increasing percentage of the total college population. Enrollments from this population have shown steady growth; in 1984 they represented 4.4% of college enrollments (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1986), and the percentage continues to escalate. It is difficult to obtain statistics specifically for Mexican-American demographics or educational attainment. Much of the research uses the umbrella categories of "Hispanic," "Spanish-speaking," or "Spanish-surnamed." These labels include those of Cuban, Puerto Rican, Spanish, Central and South American, Filipino, Indian, and Mexican descent. The social, educational, economic, and cultural experiences of these groups vary widely. Nationally, about 60% of this group is of Mexican origin. Statistics from the southwestern states are easier to interpret because in this region 86% of the Hispanic population is of Mexican descent (Alston, 1985).

Hispanic students, and Mexican Americans in particular, are under-represented at all levels of higher education (Astin, 1975; Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities, 1982; Haro, 1983; Lopez, Madrid-Barela, & Macias, 1976; Olivas, 1978; University of California, 1975). This study focuses upon students of Hispanic ancestry in the southwestern United States. The generic term "Hispanic" is not an adequate descriptor for this population. As already mentioned, there are many groups of Hispanic ancestry who are not represented in large numbers in the southwest or in this study. The population addressed by this study are those the U.S. Census (1987) refers to as "Hispanics of Mexican Origin," people who have traditionally been referred to as Mexican-American.

The reasons underlying the ability of a student of Mexican-American ancestry to complete a four year college degree while so many minority students drop out results from either the social and educational factors of the institution or upon the ability of the Mexican-American student to adapt to the system. The scope of the problem is enormous and the total population of Mexican-American students in urban, state supported universities across the country, for reasons previously reviewed, are difficult to access. For that reason this study was limited to the characteristics of a small sample in order that the data required to address the problem might be more readily obtainable.

Purpose

Those who design and implement programs to increase the retention of Hispanic students must consider all factors which may influence retention rates. Institutional responsibility to these students requires awareness of appropriate explanatory models to account for factors affecting attrition before effective programs can be designed. The purpose of the study is to learn how successful Mexican

American students surmount the factors contributing to Mexican American student attrition.

Sample

This was study of successful students of Mexican-American ancestry at the University of Arizona. The setting for this study is a large, urban, state supported, Research I university located in a metropolitan area of over 600 thousand people in the southwestern United States. In 1985, the year in which the informants for this study first matriculated at the university, the institution had a student enrollment of 30,374, of whom there were 3680 first-time, full-time freshmen. The largest representation of any minority group, 16.2%, were 362 Hispanics (SARETO, 1988).

This study used a purposive sample (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984); the subjects were those from the 1985 entering freshman class for whom the most data was available. Incoming first-time, full-time freshmen Hispanic students from the fall 1985 freshman class, 362 in total, comprised the pool of available subjects. Transfer students and students re-entering the institution after a "stop-out" period were excluded from the total. Of the total, 217 participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey during the 1985 fall orientation program. During the Spring semester of 1986 the university administered the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) to a sample of students. There were 47 students from the entering population of 362 hispanics for whom both the CIRP and CSEQ data were available. Since this study used concepts from the CIRP and CSEQ, these 47 form the target group. From those 47, all students who persisted were identified as they registered for their fourth successive year of study. There were 21 students in that group.

Method

Each student was approached by the researcher with the assistance of the Center for Research on Undergraduate Education and the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs. All 21 of the students agreed to participate in the study and intensive interviews were conducted with each subject during the months of December and January. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed for common themes.

Content analysis of the interviews was the method chosen to analyze the data because it was necessary to use an analytic method that permitted student strategies to emerge from the data. Content analysis aims at a classification of a body of content in terms of a system of categories devised to yield data relevant to specific hypotheses (Berelson, 1954). Miles and Huberman (1984) referred to this as the "modus operandi approach" or "analytic induction" where the finding emerges by seeing or hearing multiple instances of it from different sources (p.234).

Special attention was given to the indicators of social and academic integration and involvement as identified by Tinto (1975, 1987) and Astin (1984, 1985) and the meaning of those experiences to the students. The interviews were analyzed for common themes, experiences, etc. The contents of the transcribed responses were sorted in as many ways as possible and the commonalities were assigned "coding categories" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Coding means that when an interview segment contains data specific to a topic the segment was coded to indicate that data. This was done by assigning a code to each discrete topic and all responses relating to that topic were then assigned the same code.

Categories of data may be generated directly from inspection of the data, or they may be established in advance of data collection (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Mann, 1985). In the present study, identification of some categories occurred before the

interviews were formally analyzed -- for example categories identified in a review of research on Hispanic students. During the data collection more categories emerged. These were recorded and often incorporated into the way in which questions were asked in either the same or subsequent interviews. This afforded the opportunity to make inquiries of the informants with respect to the categories. It represents a type of validation of the coding categories by the informants. Therefore, data collection and some data analysis overlapped in time.

This method of coding categories resulted in numerous categories and eventually resulted in a process of data reduction. Systematic content analysis attempts to refine more casual descriptions of the content to objectively show the nature and strength of the data (Berelson, 1954). Those categories most common to the interviews became umbrella categories under which related themes are organized. After the number of coding categories was reduced by merging and eliminating categories, further reduction resulted from "clustering" (Stern, 1980) the remaining categories. Clustering means establishing connections, or "linkages" (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973) between coding categories, by identifying a higher order category under which a number of categories fit. As linkages emerged categories were reduced to form more general categories.

The Findings and Their Interpretation

Emerging from the anecdotal, self-reported data were the common experiences relating to the persistence of Mexican American students at the University of Arizona. The data divides itself naturally into two major areas, that of personal behaviors and problems, and that of institutional behaviors and problems. This paper only reviews summary findings from the personal area. Each of the following categories related to personal behaviors and problems represent a sphere where a number of codes have

been "collapsed" to create the broad theme. At this stage of the research the primary categories are: Human Support; Financial Adversity; Commitment; and Gender Differences.

Each category includes selected quotations illustrating its impact on the student experience. The term illustration is used because the anecdotes capture "pictures" that give meaning to the student experience. They are like photographs in that they capture a specified moment from the students' experience and contribute to the explanation of "what's going on here" (Freeman, 1980).

Human Support

Each of the students appears to have a strong Human Support structure. They receive personal reinforcement for their academic goals from a Human Support structure within the campus community and/or the home. Human Support is defined by this study as that support structure from which the student draws personal, academic and social support. Human Support is divided into two categories, Community and Familial Support.

Community

The concept of community is apparent in the interviews. This study defines community as identification with a group with common interests, problems, and experiences. All but one student indicated identification with some group, either formal or informal, related to the campus. The codes used in developing the concepts of community follow in alphabetical order: cheat, community, dorm, fit in, friends, friends in college, friends from high school, greeks, intramurals, involvement, Minority Action Council, MECHA Club, New Start, peer advisor, SHIP Club, social activities, student activities, student government participation, and support groups.

Specific instances of the role of community in the experiences of the students are related to their affiliations, or in some cases specific lack of affiliation. These affiliations of the students include groups like Greek organizations, athletic programs, the New Start program, and organizations related to their major. Quotations illustrating various aspects of the concept of community follow:

> [I] "got into a group, SHIP [Society of Hispanic Engineering Professionals] and I seemed to change after that. I started knowing people in my classes. ... The faces became familiar."
>
> "..it's almost impossible, unless you're an exceptional person or just an extreme loner, to make it through college without associating with a certain support group."
>
> "If you have people to kind of brave the storm with you, because it's a whole lot scarier by yourself."
>
> [Living] "on campus ...[its] easier to get involved. ... Because you're already part of a community. You have dorm functions, you have wing functions, you have your buddies across the hall..."
>
> "I went through sorority rush and I pledged right away. So that was a big part, having a sense of belonging and wanting to stay..."

It must be noted that for those students who participated in the New Start program, the impact of the friendships and networking developed in that six week program is immense. The interviews in this study were conducted three and a half years after the students' initial New Start experience, yet the seven students who went through that pre-college program continually referred to the friends, experiences, and benefits of the program which had positive impact on their college persistence. Two other students who had not participated in the program indicated that they wished they had. These

students were still able to use the services of either New Start or another student service program because a friend who had participated in New Start program introduced them to the services.

Quotations from these students illustrate the impact of this program better than a narrative analysis:

> "...a lot of ... friends ... that weren't in New Start, had some trouble adjusting because it [college] was a big change. I had that little step in between that helped."
>
> "... My friends now are people I met in New Start." "... it [New Start] gave me a foundation for a start." "... I'm hoping I would have made it through anyhow, without New Start, but it really helped to know that if I had trouble ... I could have gone somewhere and talked about it to someone who has had similar experience, who'd know where I'm coming from."
>
> "... one of the friends that I met ... went through New Start ... I learned it [about student services] through her."
>
> "I would say the New Start program would be the one that made my experience in college. I think if I hadn't gone to New Start, I would have been in really bad shape, really lost."

Only one student spoke negatively about the New Start program, "My mom was wondering why I didn't get that [New Start] ... I told her, 'Mom, I'm not stupid enough.'" Though this student did not participate in New Start or related services, the comment raises an issue not addressed in the study. Realistically there must be students who have had either negative experiences in New Start or found the program not to be helpful, yet none surfaced in this study. As a contrast to the good things about this

program it would interesting to interview some New Start students who had dropped either out of the program or out of school.

Familial Support

Familial support is the second area of Human Support. This study defines familial support as that type of support of, from, or pertaining to, the family. The codes used in developing the concepts of family follow: brother, sister, siblings, close to home, college choice, cousins, family members, family support, mother support, father support, emotion, grandparents, parent aspirations, parent support, pull others up, and reside.

There are different types of familial support (approval, financial, understanding, etc.) yet this study does not try to itemize all the distinctions. Instead the familial support is seen as a major linkage in the broad scope of student persistence behavior. It is important to note that the families of these students, whether they fully understand what the student is doing or not, whether they financially support the education expenses or not, still provide strong emotional support for the student. This emotional support manifests itself in a type of unconditional positive regard for the student's actions. This regard is present throughout student/parent or family interactions about poor grades, finances, foregone opportunities like marriage or full time, permanent employment.

Again, the best illustration of the role of this theme in student persistence comes from an interview excerpt. One female who lives at home reported that when staying up late to study, "I'll be in the kitchen drinking coffee and she'll [her mother] get up and make me something to eat. Or she'll sit down and talk to me." It is not possible for a student to find that level of support and personal care outside of the family. Any college

student or graduate who has studied late into the night can immediately recognize the value of such a level of support.

There is a delicate balance between familial support and familial pressure. The dynamic of any family will contain elements of nag as well as nurture. Yet the familial pressure important in the student psyche is more subtle, perhaps even double edged, "... I'm the first one so everybody is more or less looking up to me. ... Maybe that's helped." In the experiences of the students studied familial pressure has apparently been positive. The students have not dropped out, i.e. let the family down, yet it remains a fine line between meeting expectations and rejecting them.

Important to understanding the role of the familial support is an understanding of the importance of the family unit in Mexican American culture. Family need usually take priority over individual needs, and the family serves as a strong support system, financially and emotionally (Conyers, 1988). One of the students states this most directly, "... if they ever needed me, I would be there. ... I think that hispanics are brought up very close-knit, very family oriented..."

Others students have reported almost a reverse effect of one type of familial support: "I am the first one in my family to go to college..."; "There's never been anybody in my family that has ever gone to college"; "... I come from a real close family, even cousins, aunts, who were just real supportive and they've always been very happy for me and very proud..."; "My aunts..., when they come down to visit, they think its [her going to college] great."

This is the first instance in the study where it is noted that the successful students use something to their advantage which most research (Tinto & Cullen, 1973; Chacon, et al., 1982; Wolfle & Lichtman, 1981) finds detrimental to college persistence. The students also seem aware, on a different level, that it helps to have a family member

who, at least went to college, even if they did not graduate. "I know some of my friends whose sisters or brothers came to the university and it was very easy for them to more or less 'adapt' and know what to do because of their families' experience..." Fourteen of the students in the study manifest this characteristic of a drop out student in that they are from families with no college graduates among their family members. But the characteristic has a different impact on their persistence decisions. They appear to make an affirmation of their "need" to finish college. "I've kind of always said, 'Well, I'm going to be the first one.' And so here I am." Instead of holding them back the characteristic becomes a motivator.

Financial Adversity

A second major common theme is financial adversity. This is interwoven with the concept of familial support though an attempt was made to distinguish the two categories. If the student's disclosure dealt with a financial issue then an attempt was made to code it separate from the family issue. The codes used in developing the concept of financial adversity follow in alphabetical order and show how they echo the familial support theme: college choice, father's job, financial aid, finances, full time employment, grant, high school employment, loan, mother's job, part time college attendance, part time employment, Pell grants, Regent's waiver, scholarships, a second job, summer employment, a third job, work, work study, and work versus school.

Once again the students in the study manifest a characteristic identified in the literature as associated with drop out students, that of low socioeconomic status. Though none of the families of the students in the study are at, or below, the federal poverty level, only three of the students in the study have parents who are not blue collar workers. Precise financial data on the students was not collected so it will be necessary to pull the student financial aid files for verification of the family income levels.

There was not one student who did not report financial adversity throughout their period of attendance. Again quotations from the students best illustrate the meaning of financial problems in their academic and personal lives:

> "...I'm sick of struggling and not having enough money. ... even this semester I wanted to drop out because of my financial situation."
>
> "...right now they don't have the money and this morning my dad asked me how much I was going to need for my books. And I said, 'Well, I just got paid Friday, I'll just get them.' And I know I don't have enough, but ... I don't want him to worry about that ... because he just helped me with my tuition, and on top of my brother's [tuition] and his books."
>
> "I would go 3 to 4 weeks into a semester without a book, because I can't afford to buy it. But I just kind of make-do..."

The economic situations in some of the students families are such that they give their financial aid money or money they have earned in a part time job to their parents. Again, this is a characteristic of the dropout student as reported in the literature (Baeza, 1980; de los Santos, 1980; Munoz, 1986; NCES, 1980; Nielsen, 1986). Those students who reported helping with family expenses also reported a strong feeling of responsibility to contribute to the family finances.

> "Well, if my parents need money for something, I'll give it to them, but they pay me back. ... My older brothers and sisters helped, too, with bills ..."
>
> "Like my dad asked me, 'do you have any money?' ... If he has a big bill or something ... he runs out during the week."
>
> "But then there's times when I give them [parents] some money. It's not like I have to."

This communal commitment within the family finances does work to the advantage of students at times. Students report that grandparents and siblings help them financially with college expenses:

> "...my brother, he's working, he would notice that it [money] was running low ... and somehow he managed to have the money. So he helped out quite a bit."
>
> "...my older brother will send money every now and then. Actually, my little brother loaned me money when I first moved into the apartment..."
>
> "my grandparents ... they helped me with this spring semester. They paid for my tuition."

Financial Aid was a critical issue for every student in the study. Students expressed a lot of frustration with the application and award process as well as confusion surrounding issues such as grants versus scholarships and academic awards versus need based awards. A more complete picture of this is not available without a thorough review of the students' financial aid records. It is important to note here, however, that there is a lack of understanding on the part of the students about federal and institutional policies and procedures.

Commitment

Each of the students in the study manifest a strong, personal, internal process which has an effect on their persistence. This analysis identifies it as commitment though the concept embodies much more than that word can imply. Commitment is defined herein as an internal pledge, promise, or contract that the students have made to complete their education. The complexity of this concept is evidenced by the emotional level evident in the coding categories from which it is conceived: aspirations, career, do it, emotion, goal, graduate school, made it, make it, pride, and want it.

It will be noted here that, if the interview contents were weighted on an emotional level, the responses relating to family and the commitment of the students to their education could be viewed as the strongest motivators. The interviews generated a lot of emotion in the respondents, to the point of tears in seven of the 21 students. It was very important to these students that they be asked about their college experiences. In a way it was a recognition of the importance of the effort they put forth.

The meanings the students associate with the word "IT" have great power in their internal processes. Of course, the word was used in speech as any pronoun, but, at times the usage conveyed great meaning, most often associated with the some concept of success. This section spells the word, IT, with capital letters when it is being used in the conceptual sense in order to distinguish from the common third person pronoun usage. Precisely because of the many uses of the pronoun, IT, the word is difficult to interpret without a larger passage of text to give the context of usage:

> ...you have to really want IT. You have to be able to see IT. If you can't see yourself succeeding, you can't see yourself graduating, why are you here? Especially being Hispanic. You have to see yourself there. Actually see yourself in a cap and gown. IT may be hard and [there] may be so much going against you because so few hispanics come to college, but there has to be something in you that want's IT bad enough to go through with IT. To have that support group that helps you, that helps keep that little flame inside or whatever. As quaint as that may sound, you have to really, really want IT. ... But see, you can't do IT alone. IT's something you may do, but you do IT with support."

That paragraph may be interpreted based on paragraph structure and which noun the pronoun represents. But the conceptual meaning transmitted by the word IT is one of

overall achievement. IT is the process, the education. But IT is also the ultimate goal, graduation, the successful completion of the degree.

Besides conveying the meaning invested in the two letter word, IT, the passage above also addresses the internal process and the external support. The basic message is internal. IT has to be inside you. Again and again the students recognized this:

> "... I wanted IT. I wanted an education at a university, and I planned for IT since I was young. I planned for IT in my mind."
>
> "Keep working at IT, if you've got that drive in you."
>
> "Somehow or another, you've got to develop a spark or a motivation. If you want IT bad enough, it will be there, you'll get IT."
>
> "I want to graduate so badly. I want to be here, IT makes all the difference."
>
> "Within myself, I think I've been really determined and I don't give up very easily. As hard as it's been for me, and as many times as I've just wanted to quit everything, I still have that something that want's to continue. IT's within myself. I don't want to give up."

A "flame", a "spark", "drive", regardless of how the students name IT, IT is an internal process, an amorphous internal commitment. Other researchers give evidence of the power of this dynamic in their work on the achievement and determination of Hispanic students (Coleman, et al., 1966; Duran, 1983; Grebler, Moore, & Guzman, 1970). The work of Duran (1983) comes closest to identifying this dynamic by suggesting that personal growth characteristics play a role in the definition of achievement for Hispanic students. Further work needs to be done in this area to determine if IT is indeed a personal growth issue or if there are some aspects of this internal commitment which can be taught.

Gender Differences

The gender distribution of the students in this study was not balanced. Sixteen of the students were female, leaving only five males. The place of residence of the students has a strong impact on the role that gender difference plays in the college experience. Gender differences in the college experience were most noticeable among those students who lived at home.

Two of the males lived at home throughout their college experience. One male lived in an apartment the entire time. Another lived in a residence hall for one semester and an apartment for the remainder. And one male lived in a residence hall for his first year and a half, at home for a year and a half, abroad for a semester, and was living at home at the time of the interview.

Of the female students, seven had lived at home with their parents since high school graduation, two had lived in apartments, and two had lived in the residence halls. Two females had started out living at home, but had moved to apartments, two had lived in residence halls and apartments, and one had lived in a residence hall and a sorority house.

Staying at home during the college experience is related to the roles of finances and familial support. It was less expensive for those students as none of them reported that they were expected to pay, i.e. regularly contribute, for room and board. Living at home, however, perpetuates the parent/child role, even though the child may now be in college. None of the males in the study reported conflict with their fathers over financial or home responsibility issues. This was not true for the females.

The females in the study who lived at home reported that they were expected to help in some way with the household chores. As one female reported, "I mean, I did a

lot of cooking, I had a lot of chores, a lot of responsibilities. ... I had daily chores of dishes and then on weekends I had to help my mother with the laundry."

In contrast, the men in the study who lived at home indicated that they may, on occasion, assist with dishes or laundry but they had no regular household responsibilities. The division of labor appeared to be that of the traditional male/female roles. On top of their school work and part or full time employment the females were expected to come home and cook and clean and in some instances take care of children. That the women were aware of this double standard is evident from their comments:

> "I understand now why men succeed more in school and have all the better jobs, because they don't worry so much about personal things, as we [women] do."
>
> "My dad ... when he wanted something done, I had to do it, because my brothers were boys and they didn't have to serve."
>
> "I still had to do dishes and I still had to clean up and stuff ... My brother would help occasionally, but it was basically between me and my mom."

This role difference was not always resented by the female students, but it has an impact on college attendance and cuts into the time available to study.

Another area where gender differences were noted was that of family pressure. Some women reported that their parents and others expect them to marry instead of attain a college degree while others indicated that their need for a college education was devalued by the parents. Reports of these instances varied by each student's particular circumstances yet encompassed a wide range of issues, from the woman who reported she had to work her way through college while her parents were paying all the fees for her younger brother, to the woman who announced during the interview that she was

dropping out because she was being married in a month. Illustrations of some of these issues indicate the women's experience:

> "... in Mexico the women are not expected to go to college, in fact you are sort of discouraged from it and ... its like, 'get married and have kids ..."
>
> "a lot of people just assume that you go to college to get an Mrs. degree ..."
>
> "The women are supposed to serve men. I realized that when I was growing up, that's just how it was. ... But when I got here I realized there's all these other girls ... who weren't going to get married and were going to have careers first. I used to think, 'I'm just wasting time until I get married.' Now, I realize I don't have to get married if I don't want. I don't have to have kids."

The overall message here is that the college experience, and the family and personal issues surrounding it, is different for women than it is for men. And the men seem to be unaware of it. Not that they are not grateful for having the cooking and cleaning done, but that they are not conscious of the difference that level of responsibility makes in women's lives: "There are certain things that my sisters should do in the house to help my mom that I don't have to be involved with at all..." It is thus apparent that Mexican American women have a double burden to overcome to succeed in school.

Conclusion

These preliminary findings of the study of Mexican American college experiences contain much needed information. It is hoped that they will be generalizable to other Hispanic, and especially Mexican American, student populations and other institutions.

As one Mexican American writer so eloquently stated, "If my story is true, I trust it will resonate with significance for other lives" (Rodriguez, 1982).

Areas not yet addressed through analysis, and thus not presented here, fall under the other broad category of institutional behaviors and problems. This area will include the broad themes of Student/Professor Interaction, Academic Experiences, Student Services, and Institutional characteristics. In addition, each student was asked in the course of their interview what advice they would give to a younger brother or sister who might be interested in coming to college. Their responses provided not only further data for analysis in the study, but a wealth of information useful to Mexican American high school students who might be preparing to come to college. There are important messages in that data which must in some way be communicated to incoming students.

Preliminary Recommendations

Though it is to soon for a complete and concise set of recommendations to be made based on the data from the study there are some suggestions for institutional programming which are offered at this time.

In the area of familial support it appears that a method is needed to involve the parents in the students education so that they can develop an understanding of the challenge their son or daughter faces. Possible thoughts in this area center around providing a minority student parent's program which would involve some type of outreach (perhaps a bilingual newsletter) as well as an on campus component (perhaps a parent's day).

Within the scope of financial adversity there is an apparent need for education as to the meaning of financial aid and its availability. There is a great lack of understanding about its meaning, the application process, etc. Those who do not

receive it often take the denial personally. It is a blow to their self esteem and they never file again. There are students in the study who applied, did not receive anything, and have never applied again. Much more education needs to be done. A more clear picture of this will surface when the review of the financial aid records is complete.

One specific institutional program influencing the student experience has been identified. It seems clear that, from the experience of the students in this study that the New Start program has an immeasurable meaning to the students' persistence. Institutional strategies should be expanded to further personalize the college entry process and to inform freshmen students of the availability of programs.

Summary

The experiences revealed herein center around personal characteristics influencing student involvement and integration. The contributions of the involvement and the social integration of the Mexican American students studied is evident in the Community and Commitment themes. Some of those findings appear to correspond closely to the personal characteristics hypothesized by Tinto (1975, 1987) and Astin (1984, 1985), though the patterns emergent from the interview data have yet to be systematically compared to those identified in the literature concerning Hispanic student persistence. It appears evident that those theories do not adequately define or address the roles of family support, and cultural or gender differences yet further work with the data from this study needs to be done before the theory base can be adequately addressed.

Many of the experiences noted in the paper are indeed experiences which would be particular to a minority group, in this case Mexican Americans. Other experiences appear that they may be common to all students, and all students who persist may

develop similar survival strategies and coping skills to deal with experiences. The commonalities of experience may be common to all.

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